My Life Story

Malca Flasterstein
Josie Raborar, Storykeeper
Acknowledgement

As we near the consummation of the Ethnic Life Stories Project, there is a flood of memories going back to the concept of the endeavor. The awareness was there that the project would lead to golden treasures. But I never imagined the treasures would overflow the storehouse. With every Story Teller, every Story Keeper, every visionary, every contributor, every reader, the influence and impact of the project has multiplied in riches. The growth continues to spill onward. As its outreach progresses, "boundaries" will continue to move forward into the lives of countless witnesses.

Very few of us are "Native Americans." People from around the world, who came seeking freedom and a new life for themselves and their families, have built up our country and communities. We are all individuals, the product of both our genetic makeup and our environment. We are indeed a nation of diversity.

Many of us are far removed from our ancestors who left behind the familiar to learn a new language, new customs, new political and social relationships. We take our status as Americans for granted. We sometimes forget to welcome the newcomer. We bypass the opportunity to ask about their origins and their own journey of courage.

But, wouldn't it be sad if we all spoke the same language, ate the same food, and there was no cultural diversity.

This project has left me with a tremendous debt of gratitude for so many. The almost overwhelming task the Story Keeper has, and the many hours of work and frustration to bring forth a story to be printed. I salute you.

To the Story Tellers, thank you for letting us share in your heart and soul. It is my prayer that some or many of the stories will influence many young persons to another level, to be enmeshed in the pursuit of learning of other cultures that make up our community and the world.

This has, indeed, been a project of "Many" for the Community. Thanks to the following who have played a role in helping to achieve the goal. The list is practically endless, first names only. You know who you are and what you did . . . sincere thanks to each of you:

Caroline, Charity, Charlotte, Bob, Dana, De Ann, Ed, Eric, Erman, Jim, Joha Oke, John K, John M, June, Kay, Kendall, Maria, Mark, Michelle, Myra, Norma, Pat, Rachel, Rob, Starr, Susan, Valerie, and special recognition to Jim Coombs, SMSU, Map Department.

Jim Mauldin
Coordinator
Ethnic Life Stories
'01 '02 '03
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Birthplaces of the Storytellers
2001  2002  2003

Yohannan Abraham
Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India

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Olga Codutti
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this story to my parents for their unconditional love, sacrifices, and values they have instilled in me. They have laid a solid foundation in me to face life’s challenges with understanding and love. I have learned from them to see the good in every person and to be able to forgive.

Thanks to my children, Ran, Idan, Efrat and her husband, Doug, who bring a lot of happiness to my life.

Thanks to my husband, Bernardo, who have stood by me through the years, supports me and accepts me in spite of all my eccentricities.

Thanks to my family and friends who enrich my life.

I would like to thank Josie Raborar, who has contributed a great deal, helping me develop this story.

I would also like to thank Rabbi Rita Sherwin for taking the time to edit this story.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Jim Mauldin, the heart of this project, for inviting me to participate and for pushing me through the final moments of this unbelievable journey.
CHAPTER ONE: FAMILY HISTORY

Origin of my name

My name is Malca. I was named after my maternal grandmother. When I was born, it was the custom among Sephardic Jews (Jewish people who hail from the Middle East and Northern Africa) to perpetuate the names of their relatives while they were still alive. This tradition was their way of showing honor and respect to their elders. The firstborn was named after a paternal grandparent, and the second born was named after a maternal grandparent.

Malca is an ancient Hebrew word used in the Old Testament that means “queen.” Perhaps many, many generations ago we had a queen in our family. It is a regal name that makes me feel special and unique. I am the only one in my mother’s family who is named Malca. I have four female cousins; however, they are named after different grandmothers.

My mother and her mother before her followed the naming tradition; I did not. My breaking with this tradition is something that I regret. However, one of the overriding reasons why I chose not to continue the custom is that I married an Ashkenazic Jew (Jewish people who hail from Eastern Europe and Russia). Ashkenazic Jews do not believe in naming their children after their parents while they are still alive; by doing so, they believe the newborn is, in effect, replacing his or her namesake, which is thought to be disrespectful and offensive to their elders. The concept of a “New Israel” means modern ways. In keeping with these modern ways, my generation gives modern names to our children. In Israel, people do not have second or middle names; if that were the case, I would have had the opportunity to give the traditional names to my children.

Sefad

In the Northern part of Israel lays the holy city of Sefad where my great grandparents, Mordechi and Mashuda Shababo, were born. Sefad was built during the great revolt against the Romans in the years 66 to 70 of the Common Era, sixteen hundred years ago. At an altitude of 2790 feet, Sefad is Israel’s highest town. Known as the “Crown of Galilee,” the city has cobblestone streets that lead to several ancient synagogues. Two of these hundreds-of-years-old synagogues are Rabbi Caro’s home of prayer and learning and the synagogue of Rabbi Luria.

Sefad became an important center of Jewish life in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. In 1536, Rabbi Josef Caro, author of “Shulchan Aruch,” one of the most authoritative handbooks on Jewish practices, fled from Turkey to Israel with his followers and settled in Sefad. In 1575, Rabbi Isaac Luria moved to Sefad from Egypt. He was a prominent rabbi and founding father of Kabbalah. Kabbalah is a comprehensive philosophical, theological and mystical system of beliefs. It explains the nature of God, the creation of the universe, the destiny of man and the power of the Hebrew letters.
On the hillside below Sefad lies the famous cemetery in which generations of Kabbalist mystics are buried. People come to pray and light candles at the gravesites, believing that each one of these Kabbalist rabbis has the power to answer their prayers. According to Rabbi Shapiro, the light of the candle represents the flickering reality of the human soul. At nightfall the graveyard looks like a city asleep, twinkling with lights from the burning candles.

Surrounded by mountains, natural springs are found in Sefad. It is believed that their water has the power to cure the sick and to make old people look young again. Perhaps it is this legend, or the mysticism of the place, or its natural beauty that has drawn droves of artists to settle in Sefad since the birth of modern Israel.

My journey to the past

In 1996, I flew to Israel to visit my family and friends and to search for my roots. Those who made the journey with me were my two aunts, my uncle, my sister and her daughter. It had been fifteen years since my mother passed away and that was the time I definitely missed her. The drive to Sefad was two and a half hours from Tel Aviv by car. We went straight to the famous old cemetery to search for my great-grandfather’s gravestone. On our way we came upon a spring and my aunt Janet remembered that her grandmother had told her that when she was very young her father used to take her with him to immerse in the spring. That was bold and daring of him to do so because the spring was exclusively for male use at that time. Today, nothing has changed. We saw the spring encircled with a high wood fence and on the gate was a big sign saying, “Women are forbidden to enter.”

After a good deal of searching, we found my great-grandfather’s family plots in a cave, with his name engraved on one of the gravestones. My aunt Janet lit a candle and prayed for health and peace. Exhausted but happy, we contemplated what to do next. At that moment a stranger came by. We asked him if he knew anyone from the Shababo family living in Sefad, and where we could find them. To our astonishment he exclaimed that he is a Shababo descendant and lived up the hill in the old Jewish section of town. Ecstatic, we talked all at once, saying that we are Shababos and our great-grandparents were born in Sefad. He was thrilled to meet us and invited us to his house, a short distance from the famous synagogue of Rabbi Luria. When the house was in sight, my aunt knew instantly that this was the house her grandmother always talked about. It is a modest, three-story stone house overlooking the cemetery, with concrete benches. (I remember my aunt telling me that her grandmother used to describe their beds as concrete benches with mattresses on top.) The man introduced us to his centenarian father, who was bedridden. We asked the man to inquire of his father what he knew about our great-grandfather. He impressed me with how much he could remember. He recalled that he was a child when my great grandfather married and that the Shababo family owns half the old city of Sefad. The family’s wealth stems from owning the city granary during the famine after the great earthquake of 1837. For a brief moment we amused ourselves with the thought that we were rich overnight—the land in Sefad is very valuable. However, reality set in. The Shababo clan is very large, and any wealth accumulated would be meager once dispersed. It was already dark outside when we made our way back to the car. Gazing at the cemetery...
below, I envisioned the burning candles as twinkling lights of the flickering soul, and this image combined with the whistling of the wind made me feel the holiness of the place.

*My great-grandparents, Mashuda and Mordechi Shababo*

My great grandfather, Mordechi Shababo, was born in the late 1800’s in Sefad. From what my aunts and uncles and other relatives can recall, he was an Orthodox Jew and he worked for his family’s business. He met Mashuda (luck) Abu, whose father was a well-known spiritual rabbi, and married her. They lived with my great-grandfather’s family for a while and had two children, but Grandma Mashuda was unhappy. She was not getting along with her parents-in-law. She decided to move with her two children to Cairo, Egypt. That was a bold and daring move, as she did not know anyone in Egypt. Her husband and his sister followed. They were happy in Egypt and had two more children. When Grandfather Mordechi’s sister got engaged, he went back to Sefad to settle his sister’s dowry with his father. Unfortunately, shortly after his return to Sefad, he was accidentally killed.

Grandmother Mashuda became a widow with four children to raise on her own in Cairo. She vowed she would never take her husband’s family inheritance. She worked to support her children by rolling tobacco into cigarettes. Later on a wealthy man whose wife was very ill hired her as a nanny. She cared for his children like her own and they called her Mom. In return he paid her well. She was able to provide for her own children what they needed and more. Years later her employer’s wife died and he asked her to marry him but she refused. In her old age she moved to Mansura and lived with her daughter Malca (my grandmother) and her husband.

My Grandmother Mashuda possessed some mystical powers. In World War I, Grandma Mashuda’s two sons joined the Turkish Army. Her sons had no contact with her for several years and yet she knew where they were and what they were doing. Her neighbors asked her about their sons and as she looked into a bowl of oil, she was able to tell them how they were. She was a very religious person and did not use her power to make money. She prayed everyday, observed the Sabbath, and ate only kosher food. My Grandma Malca’s family and Great-Grandma Mashuda returned to Israel when the political situation became unsafe for Jews in Egypt.

This is my recollection of Grandma Mashuda. I remember her in her advanced years as slender, not tall, with two long braids coming out of a scarf (in Hebrew it is called a mitpachat) worn tightly around her head. She always had a cigarette in her hand. A good gift for her was a pack of cigarettes. She died in Israel when she was ninety-six years old.

*My grandparents, Malca and Ezra Mizrachi*

My Grandmother Malca was born in Cairo, Egypt in 1904. She was seventeen years old when she married my grandfather Ezra, who lived in Mansura, northeast of Cairo. It was a second marriage for Grandfather Ezra. The first one ended in a divorce; however, out of that union he had a son, Shaul. My grandmother raised him as if he were her own son.
Together they had six children, two sons (Morris and Eli) and four daughters (Marcel, Janet, Fortun, and Lillian).

Grandfather Ezra made his living as a merchant and was an assistant rabbi in the synagogue. They lived in a big house and employed three women to help with household duties. When the German forces bombed the city of Alexandria, my grandparents were able to give refuge to several families that fled the city.

My aunt Janet inherited my grandmother Mashuda’s mystical power. She told me that she began to be aware of this gift at a very young age. She recalled neighbors would give her candies in exchange for telling their future. Her ability to see things in the future became more serious when at fifteen years of age she told her parents that an Israeli terrorist group had assassinated General Bernadotte, the UN mediator in Israel. At that time Jews and Arabs were pointing fingers at each other, accusing one another and creating more tension in an already volatile situation. Afraid that my aunt Janet would inadvertently give away this information to their Muslim neighbors, my grandparents hid her. After several months of investigation, the English police in charge of peace in Israel arrested the Israeli terrorists.

My aunt Janet married Eduard Abuab in 1949 and moved to Beersheba, Israel. In 1956 uncle Shaul and uncle Morris immigrated to the United States. They were textile merchants in New York City. Six years ago my Uncle Shaul passed away, and three years later we lost Uncle Morris. Aunt Fortun married Eli Menasche and left Egypt in 1956 to live in Colombia, South America. Today Aunt Lillian and Aunt Fortun live in Miami with their families. Uncle Eli was only seventeen years old when he died. He had a brilliant mind; at seventeen he earned his engineering degree and my mother told me that if he had remained alive he would have brought a lot of honor to the family, and the family would have ascended to the upper class. Jewish people value intelligence more than anything, which is perhaps true in many cultures.

In 1956, after all their children left Egypt, my grandparents with their youngest daughter Lillian, who was sixteen years old at that time, moved to Israel. They were sent to live in a transit camp next to Benyamina, north of Tel Aviv. When I was nine years old I remember visiting them at their shack that did not have indoor plumbing. I had to use a toilet facility that was similar to an outhouse. It was a strange experience for me and I felt sadness for my grandparents and Aunt Lillian. My aunt Lillian, in order to leave the place, married her cousin Mordechi Shababo who lived in Tel Aviv. When she left, my grandparents moved to Beersheba in the southern part of Israel to be close to my aunt Janet. Beersheba in Hebrew means “seven wells.” According to the Bible it is the place with the desert climate where the Patriarch Abraham found the seven wells.
Our family lived in Holon at that time. Holon to Beersheba is three hours by bus. The distance kept us from seeing our grandparents as often as we would have liked. We visited them every other year on holidays. My grandfather Ezra was a tall, handsome man, a down-to-earth Orthodox Jew who wore his kippa (skullcap) all the time. Wearing the kippa means recognizing a being higher than you. Now when I think about him he reminds me of my mom who looked like him and had the same disposition. Among my siblings I am the one who inherited their genes. My aunts say that I have the same looks and nature as my mom.

What I particularly remember of my grandfather is that his middle and index fingers were joined. It was a congenital anomaly but he enjoyed telling us the story that when he was little he loved playing with glue and that’s how his fingers got stuck together. As young children we believed him. He died in 1965 and my grandmother Malca passed away two years later.
My parents, Marcel and Yehuda Levy

My mother Marcel was born in 1927 in Mansura, Egypt. She was the fourth of seven children. She had curly black hair, brown eyes, and the most beautiful smile. She was modest and kind. She had a happy childhood. She received her formal education from a French school, “Aliance.” Her schoolmate Julia told me that she was a good student and well-liked by everyone. Because of her father’s duty as an assistant rabbi, her family attended the services at the synagogue on Fridays and Saturdays. In an Orthodox synagogue, men and women are seated separately. They believe that men would be distracted by women and would not be able to focus on praying. In the synagogues in Mansura and in some synagogues in Israel, women are seated in the balcony overlooking the ark and the men are seated in the main floor facing the ark. Fidgety young women look down, scrutinize the young men, and in their hearts choose their future husbands.

My mother used to say that the synagogue is the biggest matchmaking enterprise. She, on the other hand, fell in love with the boy next door. He was the second of three children. After my mother’s graduation from high school, they decided to get married and got their parents’ blessings. Everything was prepared for the wedding in the synagogue. They were to live in an apartment that her father rented and furnished for them as part of her dowry. On her big day, she was a beautiful bride standing in her glorious wedding dress surrounded by her family and friends waiting for the groom to arrive. They waited and waited and the groom never came. Awkwardness turned to confusion, to embarrassment, and then to shock. They found out the next day that the groom’s mother decided at the last minute that they needed to follow their custom: the first child must marry before the second one. I think they believed that if the second child marries first, the first-born might not marry at all.

To help her forget the disconcerting situation, my mother’s family sent her to live with her brother Shaul and his family in Cairo. She had many proposals, even from her former fiancé, but rejected them all. Two years later she met my father, Yehuda Levy, through his brother-in-law who was my Uncle Shaul’s best friend. It was probably love at first sight for him, but for her it was a different story. In the beginning she refused to see him but he showered her with flowers and chocolates until she agreed to marry him. They were
engaged on November 9, 1947. I remember this date very well because my father told me that every Jew on the street wished him *mazel-tov* (meaning good luck). At first he could not understand how everyone knew about his engagement. Later he found out that it was a historical day for Israel. People on the street were celebrating the decision of the United Nations to accept the partition plan to have two states in Palestine, one Jewish and one Arab. Jerusalem would become an international city under UN control. The American president Harry Truman and the Russian premier Josef Stalin supported this plan. That was probably the last time a U.S. president and a Russian premier agreed on the same thing.

My parents were married in the synagogue in 1948 and lived in Cairo. On May 1, 1949 they had their first-born son and named him Ezra, after the two grandfathers. It was a happy event that was marred by the conflict and tension between the Arabs and Jews. Before 1948 the Jewish community in Egypt numbered 65,000 to 70,000 people. They had good relationships with the Muslims, but after Israel became an independent state and during the Arab-Israeli war, hundreds of Jews were arrested, their properties confiscated and their businesses destroyed. Bombings in the Jewish areas killed and wounded hundreds of Jews.

My maiden name is Levy, a name from the Old Testament and one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses and Aaron were members of the Levy tribe. According to the Bible, after the exodus from Egypt and forty years of wandering in the desert, the tribes arrived in Israel. Each tribe was granted land except the Levites (the Levy tribe) and the Cohens, who were appointed to work in the Holy Temple.

My father Yehuda Levy was born in Cairo in 1915. His father Ezra came from Turkey and his mother Frieda came from Morocco. They lived in Egypt where her parents owned many stores in Cairo. They met on a ship, married, and had three children. My father was the first-born and only son. He had two sisters, Rachel and Rose. My father did not finish high school. He had some difficulties in school and was very mischievous. His father believed that “to spare the rod is to spoil the child” so he was very tough on him. Today we know what his parents did not know: he was a dyslexic child. He was very smart, he could do math in his head faster than using a calculator. He loved history and political science. I remember that every morning he sat next to the radio and listened to the BBC news from London. Later in the evening he would carry on a lively discussion of the news with his friends. He worked with his father in the textile business. He became successful and made more money than his father. In Egypt he became a backgammon champion. When he moved to Israel, there was no dearth of worthy opponents. The pool of challengers was his friends, his relatives, sons-in-law, his children and grandchildren. As a child I loved playing with him. When he died my brother threw the backgammon dice into the grave before they covered it with earth.
CHAPTER TWO: EARLIEST MEMORIES AND CHILDHOOD

Moving to Israel

In December of 1949, my parents with my father’s family left Egypt on a ship that sailed to Israel via Italy. They arrived in Jaffa harbor; my parents were taken to live in a tent camp near Tel Aviv while my father’s family was taken to a transit camp forty minutes from Tel Aviv. The next day Tel Aviv was blanketed with snow, the first time ever that snow fell in Israel. Israel has a Mediterranean climate characterized by long, hot, dry summers and short, cool, rainy winters as modified locally by altitude and latitude. The drop in temperature and the inadequate facilities were precarious conditions for my mother and my six-month-old brother. My father immediately arranged for his family to live with his relatives in Jaffa. For a year they rented a room in their house, sharing the kitchen and the bathroom.

My parents with my brother Ezra when they arrived in Israel in 1949.

In October of 1950, my parents had their second child, my sister Frieda. With a growing family, my father decided he needed a job with a stable salary. He found one with the help of a relative. He was in charge of several parks in the city of Holon. He accepted the position even though he did not have any experience and the pay was low, because he enjoyed the idea of working in the park. He had several workers under him; they cut the grass, and planted and trimmed the trees and hedges. He would ride his bicycle in the
morning to the park, give them their assignments, hand them the tools and equipment, then he would go home for a break with his friend. They would play backgammon and drink Turkish coffee with my mother’s freshly baked cookies. Afterwards he would go back to the park, inspect the work that was done, and release the workers for the day. Every month he brought home his salary in cash and gave it to my mother, who stashed it in the kitchen cupboard between the plates. When I was newly married I did the same thing. I put some cash in between the plates until one time I took out some money and broke all my china.

I remember that every morning my father was the first one to get up and he would make the coffee. He and my mother would have their morning coffee together and discuss the day’s plan. Before leaving for work, my mother would wish him in Arabic “Allah m’ack” (meaning “God will be with you”). I think it is a more powerful wish than the one we use today, which is “Have a good day.”

Now it was time to look for a place to live in Holon, which is about half an hour from Tel Aviv by car. Holon comes from the Hebrew word “chol” meaning sand. Indeed the city was not far from the Mediterranean Sea and was built on the dunes. We could have had a single-family house with an outside toilet but my father chose a new apartment, the first one built in Holon that was more modern and more expensive than the single-family house. He wanted the very best for my mother, and for his children to grow up in a culturally diverse neighborhood. People from different countries lived there. My father wanted us to be exposed to other world cultures. He bought the unit in 1951. The apartment complex was a long rectangular four-story building with three separate entrances on one side of the building. Each entrance led to eight units, two on each floor. Each unit had two and half rooms, a kitchen, a toilet room, a bathroom and two balconies. In front of the building was a huge
lawn and in the back was a big area, which we used as playground. After my father paid for the apartment unit, the exact location was decided by lottery. My parents got the one with the middle entrance on the first floor.

I was born on November 19, 1951 in a hospital in Jaffa because at that time there were no hospitals in Holon, and from there I was taken to live in the new apartment. I lived there for twenty-four years, until my marriage. On November 18, 1954 my youngest sister was born. My parents named her Carmela.

My family of six people shared the two-and-a-half room apartment. One room was the girls’ bedroom. We would sleep there at night and in the morning we would fold our rollaway beds, put them under the bookshelves and conceal them with curtains. The room doubled as our study room. Along the opposite wall was the family closet. The second room was our parents’ bedroom at night and in the morning they would fold the sofa and the room became our living room. The half room was the entrance hall where my brother slept on a sofa. The hall was big enough to accommodate a dining room set. From the hall to the right, there was an exit to the front balcony. To the left of the hall were the bathroom and the kitchen with a door that lead to the back balcony. From that balcony I would feed the neighborhood cats with the food that I didn’t like.

My mother was a stay-at-home mom. Three children one year apart in age and the fourth three years younger needed all the attention and care she could give. When one of us got sick, the next day all of us would get it. I remember the three of us staying at home with mumps; our faces were swollen which made us look like the three little pigs. We were happy that we did not have to go to school, we played together, and my mother spoiled us with candies and cooked our favorite food.

Like most women of her generation, my mother knew how to sew. She had a Singer sewing machine and she made dresses and bloomers for us girls. She also knew how to knit and she made me a special orange sweater with a hood that I loved. Now I regret that I didn’t keep it; it would have been a wonderful reminder of my mom.

My mother cleaned the house, washed the dishes and cooked every day. My father would help my mother with household chores, sweep the floor, and go with her to the supermarket in order to carry the heavy baskets. My mom did all the laundry by hand and she would put it in a big pile which my father would take out to the building’s common clothesline and help my mom hang it up to dry. My father used to ride his bicycle to the ice factory and bring blocks of ice for the icebox. We got our first refrigerator when I was ten years old. For my mom’s birthday my father surprised her with a brand new washing machine; I was twelve years old then.

My mother suffered from migraine headaches a lot. She took Optalgin pills for them, asked us to be quiet, and would close all the shutters and go to sleep in the dark room. Sometimes
she would put a slice of potato on her painful temple and tie it with a cloth strap around her head; later I heard potatoes could ease the pain. My brother Ezra, my sister Carmela, and I also suffer from migraine. Now my daughter Efrat has inherited it from me.

My sister Frieda and I helped our mother with household chores. When I was tall enough to reach the clothesline, at about thirteen years old, I helped hang the wash. I remember the most difficult to hang were the sheets. I had to hold them high and fold them on the clothesline fast so that they will not touch the ground. Once in a while I was sent with my sister Frieda to my paternal grandparents’ house, which was half an hour’s walk from our house. We would clean the house, and I remember vividly the times when my grandmother did not like the way we mopped the floor, so she would pour a bucket of water and make us mop the floor all over again. The only time I looked forward to going there was during the summer when their mulberry tree was filled with fruits. I loved climbing it, picking the fruits and eating them. Last year while walking in my neighborhood here in Springfield, I saw a mulberry tree. Birds were eating the fruits. I couldn’t resist, I picked several and ate them. It took me back to my childhood forty years ago.

*My neighbors*

The neighbor who lived across from us was Klara Levy from Bulgaria. She was a widow who had moved to Israel with her father and two children. Her children were older than us. Every morning her father would go out for his daily walk and buy a newspaper for us. When we had guests for the holidays, she would offer her tables and chairs. She bought a TV set before we did and my parents would go to her apartment every Friday evening to watch Egyptian movies. I remember I had to use her bathroom several times when it got too busy at ours. We called her Auntie Klara. Five years ago when I flew to Israel for a vacation, my sister Frieda and I went to visit Auntie Klara, who was ninety years old and staying in a nursing home. When she saw me she was dumbstruck. It took her a long time to speak; she thought she was seeing my mother. She could not believe how much I resemble my mother. The whole time we were with her, she talked incessantly about my mother and recalled some fond memories of her.

Above us on the second floor lived the Rabinovitz family. They were Orthodox Jews from Poland. Their two children studied in a religious school. Every Friday evening when they returned from the synagogue, they would ask me to turn on the stairway light for them because Orthodox Jews are forbidden to do any work on Shabbat. Turning on electricity is considered work. I became their “Shabbat Goy” meaning a non-Jew who does the work for the strict Orthodox Jews on Shabbat. Even though I am a Jew, as a secular Jew, I do chores on Shabbat like driving, and using electricity.

On the holy day of Sukkot, the Rabinovitzes would build a *sukka* (a temporary hut with a roof made from tree branches). The *sukka* symbolizes the temporary huts where the Israelites lived during their wandering in the desert. They built their *sukka* on the lawn in front of our apartment. They would run an electrical cord from their apartment to the *sukka*
so they could have their dinners there for eight days. We, the children in the building, built our own sukka in the backyard and made our own decorations for it. Our parents brought our dinners to the sukka and the children ate together and sometimes we exchanged food with one another.

Every Chanukah my mother would make her special Egyptian recipe of sufganiot (jelly doughnuts), and when the aroma of the fried sufganiot would reach the second floor, Isaak Rabinovitz would come down to have some. We eat sufganiot to remember the miracle of the oil because sufganiot are deep fried in oil. When the Jews won the war against the Syrian-Greek regime that tried to impose restrictions on the practice of Judaism, they entered the Temple and found a small flask of oil to light the menorah. A miracle occurred and the tiny amount of oil lasted for eight days.

Years later Isaak Rabinovitz would cross paths with my husband. He was my husband’s commander in the army regiment that was sent to serve in the Sinai. His father was one of the witnesses in our wedding. In a Jewish wedding, two witnesses must confirm that the groom agrees to the terms of the ketubah (marriage contract).

Next to the Rabinovitz family lived the Kaiser family from Austria. They had a grown-up daughter. Maro and Isaak Katan lived on the third floor and were my parents’ good friends. I used to baby-sit their children. It was fascinating to watch how Mrs.Katan put her garments together and how she applied her makeup. She was the one who taught me how to use lip liner and lipstick. My mother very rarely used lipstick. Next to them lived Mrs. Laden from Russia. She was a widow with no children. She was in charge of the building maintenance and I remember her always yelling at us children when we played on the grass or we came out to play before four o’clock in the afternoon, when everyone was taking their nap. On the fourth floor lived the Chason family from Greece. Mrs. Shimcha Chason, who had two sons, was also my mother’s good friend. Every morning when she went downstairs, she would stop at my home to chat with my mom. Next to them lived the Schnizer family from Hungary. Mr. Schnizer was a very religious man and did not use a razor for shaving; instead, he used a malodorous cream to shave. We held our breath and pinched our noses when we saw him coming. In the summer they did not go to the beach because their religion forbade them from going to a public beach where there is no separation between men and women. He would ask my father to fill big bottles with water from the sea; then he would pour the salty water into the tub and have his daughter soak.

My father was right about integration. We had neighbors from almost all over the world: Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Yemen, Russia, Greece, and Syria. We helped each other. My parents liked them and soon they became friends and their children became our friends. We could tell, by their country of origin, who was Ashkenazic and who was Sephardic, but we got along so well that we did not mind the differences.
Yet being a Sephardic Jew in Israel at that time was not easy. Ashkenazic Jews were favored socially and politically. Before and after World War II, the majority of Jews who migrated to Israel were the Ashkenazim from Europe. They occupied positions of prestige and influence, especially in government. The Sephardic Jews fled from North Africa and other countries in the Middle East to Israel in the 1950s to 1960s. The newcomers were sent to live in the periphery of the city where jobs were scarce, and some of them became dependent on welfare. The Sephardic Jews from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, and Syria, who were educated and respected, were given jobs in construction.

Sephardic Jews with darker skin, who speak with a Middle Eastern accent and who speak Arabic, are considered inferior. Marriage between an Ashkenazi and a Sephardi was very rare. In our neighborhood, we did not feel discriminated against, but I remember that when I had friends over, the moment I heard my father play Arabic music (his favorite Egyptian singers were Um Caltun and Farid el Atrash), I would ask him to turn down the volume because Arabic music and anything Arabic was considered low class. I can understand Arabic but I cannot speak it because I was ashamed to answer my parents in Arabic, so I chose to talk to them in Hebrew. However, my cousins who live in Beersheba, where the majority of the population is Sephardic, are fluent in Arabic. Times have changed; the younger generation in Israel today is drawn to popular Israeli songs and music with Arab melodies.

My childhood

At age five I started kindergarten at a school that was fifteen minutes’ walking distance from our house. We studied six days a week from eight a.m. to twelve noon. In Israel there are no school buses; we were lucky to live so close to school. Every morning my mother would wake my brother, my sisters, and me at seven and we would wash our faces, brush our teeth, and have our tea with cookies. Then we put on our uniforms of light blue shirts with the school’s logo embroidered on the left pocket, and a blue skirt or pants. Before leaving we had to have our glass of milk and then we would run to school and get there ten minutes before they closed the gate. Those who were late would have to stay behind the gate during the flag ceremony and the morning exercises. Then the teacher in charge of attendance would let them in, take their names, and report them to the principal. Sending them to a lower grade for a day was the punishment for students who were tardy for the third time.
I liked going to school to learn and to be with my friends. The average number of students in each class was forty. One of my teachers in third grade was Miss Ruth, whom I liked very much. She was in her fifties and very kind to all her students. One time when she was very ill I was chosen with two other friends to bring her gifts and letters from our class. I remember being at her home, very impressed by her elegant living room furnished with antique European furniture and paintings. Another teacher, Miss Zahava, in seventh grade, would ask me and other students to go to her house to help her grade test papers. There were times when a first-or-second grade teacher was absent and she would send me with a classmate to substitute. My English teacher was Mr. Sheraga from Hungary. His strong accent made it difficult to learn from him the proper pronunciation of the language. My math teacher was Mr. Mashiach, who was born in Iraq and the only Sephardic teacher in my school. Everyone imitated his strong accent and made fun of it. My agriculture teacher, Mr. Benjamin, would hand me a note to give to my mom every time he saw me. The note was about my brother Ezra misbehaving in his class. Somehow my brother would know about the note and he would force me to give it to him before I could take it home to my mother.

Malca at age five.

The year I learned how to read, my mother would sit next to me while I did my homework and would ask me to read aloud to her. Only later I understood that I was her Hebrew teacher. She learned to read and write Hebrew through me. Later she was able to read the newspaper and enjoyed reading it every day. My mother spoke and wrote in Arabic and French. She and my father conversed in Arabic; they talked to us in Hebrew.

In Israel lunch is the main meal. When I came home from school I could tell by the aroma from far away what was for lunch. When my mom fried something, I knew it was either
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Malca Flasterstein

falafel or schnitzel, which are my two favorite dishes. My least favorite food is anything that is boiled.

Between two p.m. and four p.m., the whole town sleeps. It is siesta time. The shops, banks, and other businesses are closed. The children are not allowed to play outside. While my parents were taking their siesta, I did my homework and then took my nap. At four o’clock, my parents would drink their Turkish coffee and I would go outside to play games with my friends in the neighborhood. I liked to jump rope, play ball, play hide and seek and other games.

My favorite game was one called “seven stones.” One group would place seven oval or rounded flat stones, about the size of a regular bar of soap, one on top of the other. The other group would throw a ball to knock down the stones. The group that had piled up stones would try to pile them back up while the other group tried to prevent them by throwing the ball at the kid who tried to put the stones back. If the ball hit him, he was out. The game ended when all the kids in one group either were out or if they were able to stack the seven stones. I enjoyed playing “telephone” with my two good friends Olivia and Gila, who lived in the building across from us. We would hook empty cans with a string and I would talk standing on my front balcony while they were on their back balcony. We did not own a television set until I was fifteen years old, so playing games was not only great fun but also it was a good way to keep fit and to avoid being overweight, and also to prepare me to become a good athlete. In school I became good in short distance running, in basketball, in handball, and in shot put.

Sometimes after the games I would treat myself with steaming hot white corn that I bought from a man with a huge steamer cart at the corner of our street, or with red candied apples on a stick from a man who went around on his tricycle.

There were special buses to the beach during summer vacation. Three times a week, my brother, my sisters, and I would get up early and run to the bus station. There was always a crowd of people from our neighborhood, and we would stand in line for our bus seats. Our parents almost always came at the last minute, carrying our provisions of food, drinks, and towels. As we got closer to the beach we would look outside our windows with great anticipation to see the color of the flag displayed at the lifeguard’s tower. If it was white it meant the water was good for swimming and we could go as far out as we wanted. Red meant we could swim, but not far. Black meant no swimming, so we would build sand castles instead. The first one to see the color of the flag would announce it and everybody would yell it together.

My mother always said that the best place to feed us, especially me, was at the beach. I was a picky eater but being outdoors with fresh air improved my appetite. Even the simple food of pita bread with cheese, tomatoes, and hard-boiled egg was sooo delicious.
In Israel on Shabbath, from Friday evening till Saturday evening, the stores are closed and buses don’t run. On Saturday evening, when Shabbat is over, around six o’clock our family would take the first bus to Tel Aviv. We would stroll along Allenby Street, the main street with trendy shops that leads to the beach. We would walk along the street looking at shop windows until we got to the beach. Then we would sit on a bench and feel the calmness of the sea and watch the beautiful sunset. My father would buy us chocolate-vanilla ice cream that we call in Hebrew *glida America*-it (meaning American ice cream) because it was ice cream that came out of a big ice cream machine made in the United States, like Dairy Queen.

My favorite holiday is Chanukah. Chanukah is an eight-day celebration. Every day at nightfall, we used to gather in the kitchen around the *menorah* (a candelabrum with eight branches and an additional branch for the service light that we use to light the other eight candles). On the first day we light one candle, and each day another candle is added until all candles are lit. I liked to say the blessings that I knew by heart before lighting the candles, to sing the holiday songs and to eat potato pancakes (latkes), but the best of all were my mother’s special *sufganiot* (in Arabic, *zalabia*). The oily aroma, the flickering lights of the candles, and the family gatherings are memories that I will hold in my heart forever. Spinning the dreidel is a symbol of this holiday. The dreidel is a four-sided top with four Hebrew letters, one on each side. The letters stand for the Hebrew words “a great miracle happened here.” In America, the dreidel says “a great miracle happened there.” We used to play with the dreidel for money; we would spin it and guess the letter that would show when it stopped spinning and fell on one of its sides. The one who guessed correctly would win the bet and get the money. That was my first gambling experience. In Israel we got coins as Chanukah presents. In the morning we would play with the coins. We would stand twelve feet from the wall, and each child in turn would throw a coin, trying to get it as close to the wall as possible. The child whose coin was closest to the wall won all the coins. However, today in the United States, this tradition of receiving coins for Chanukah has changed. Children eat chocolate candies shaped like coins as a reminder of the old tradition, and they receive more than one gift. They receive one for each day, influenced by the tradition of Christmas gift-giving. However, my husband and I continue the old tradition of giving money as Chanukah gifts to our children.

Passover, the feast of freedom, is very special to me. We celebrate it in the spring. The change in the weather, new leaves on the trees, fields ablaze with color, and thorough housecleaning are messengers of the holiday. For eight days Jews cannot eat or see any leavened bread or any food containing leavening, including wheat, barley, and oats that are soaked in water at least eighteen seconds, because after eighteen seconds of wheat being soaked in water it becomes sour. Because the children of Israel, in their haste to leave Egypt, baked bread without giving it time to become sour and to rise, these foods are called in Hebrew *hametz*, which means sour. Two weeks before the holiday we would help my mom clean the house in order to get rid of the *hametz*. We washed the oil-painted walls in the hall, cleaned every corner of the house, lined the shelves where *hametz* had been stored with new paper liner, cleaned the stove and the oven. On the morning of the holiday dinner we would have a big bonfire where all the children in our neighborhood would throw the
 leftover *hametz*. The dinner is called a *seder*, which is Hebrew for “order,” because we conduct the holiday dinner and eat the special foods in a strict order. During dinner we read from a book called the Haggadah, which means “tell” because it tells the story of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. Reading the Haggadah is the most important requirement of Passover. Parents are obligated to teach their children the story of the exodus. I like the part in the Haggadah that says that in every generation everyone is obligated to regard himself as though he himself had actually gone forth from Egypt. At that part my grandfather would put matzah (unleavened bread) in a square cloth, tie the four corners and make it look like a bundle. He would put it over one of his shoulders and we would ask him, “Where are you coming from?” and he would answer, “From Egypt.” Next we would ask him, “Where are you going to?” and he would move the bundle around his nape to his other shoulder and reply, “To Jerusalem.” After my grandfather did this, everyone took his or her turn. I have continued this tradition with my own family and taught it to my Ashkenazic friends. During Passover, Sephardic Jews eat rice and corn but Ashkenazic Jews don’t because they consider them *hametz*. However, my husband and son-in-law, who are Ashkenazic, have adopted my Sephardic tradition and they enjoy eating rice and corn on Passover.
CHAPTER THREE: MY TEEN YEARS

Joining the Social Youth Organization

At age thirteen I joined the Social Youth Organization that was related to the kibbutz movement. A kibbutz is a community settlement. Initially my intent in joining was to be around Yoram, a nice and handsome young man who was our counselor from Kibbutz Be’eri. When I got to the meeting place for the first time, with four boys and two girls from my seventh-grade class and Yoram, we were joined by a group of twenty members from two other schools. They were my peers and they accepted me as their friend. I immediately knew that I would enjoy their company so I decided to join the organization. One of my best friends in the group was Judith. This year when I visited Israel, Judith and I got together and reminisced, and before I left she promised to organize a group reunion when I visit her again next year.

Three times a week, on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, my friends and I would walk about forty minutes from our neighborhood to the meeting place. There were two rectangular cabins; we held our meetings in the first one, which was partitioned into four sections. We would discuss the future of Israel, Jews in the Diaspora, and relationships among peoples. We also played sports and fun games. We were required to wear blue shirts with red laces and pants or shorts as our uniforms. The second cabin, where we met on Friday evenings with the other groups, was like a big hall. The Holon branch had six groups from seventh to twelfth grades. Together we sang Shabbat songs and also Israeli patriotic and love songs with Russian melodies, influenced by the first Russian Jews who immigrated to Israel before Israel’s Independence Day in 1948. We danced Israeli dances until late in the evening. Our Friday evening attire was white shirts and pants. Tights and high-heeled shoes were not allowed. We were forbidden to dance ballroom dances.

On Saturdays on our way home we would stop at the Holon Center and treat ourselves to ice cream, falafel, or pizza. We would sit on the benches and have our girl talks. One of the topics was boys. When we turned fifteen, the time of hormonal changes, we started to talk about having crushes on the boys. In order to know who had a crush on whom, we would play truth or dare and a game called “Old Bachelor.”

This is how we played it. The girls sit on one bench and the boys sit on another bench, at a distance from the girls. Each girl chooses a boy she wants for a boyfriend, and one by one the boys walk over to the girls’ bench. Each boy bows to the girl he thinks has chosen him, and if he guesses correctly, the girls all shout “wedding!” and he remains standing by the girls’ bench, but not beside any girl in particular. If he guesses incorrectly and bows to the wrong girl, she makes a face at him and he has to return to the boys’ bench. If a boy bows to a girl who is already “married,” he has to run back to the boys’ bench while the girl’s “husband” runs after him, hitting him on the back. After several boys are standing at the girls’ bench, it is scarier for the other boys who come up. They stand with one leg forward.
ready to run if they propose to a girl who is already “married.” The other boys will run after them and hit them if they have to go back to the boys’ bench. The boy who is not chosen is the “old bachelor.” It was usually the same guy every time.

Twice a year we went on excursions with groups from other cities like Haifa and Tel Aviv. For two weeks we would camp in the Judean desert or in the forest on Mt. Carmel. We met kids my age, played competitive games, cooked together, shared stories, sang, danced, and before we separated we exchanged addresses. I was able to see many places in Israel because my parents were willing to pay for my expenses. They understood the importance of being involved with other kids and being exposed to other cultures. My parents did not own a car; they knew that traveling with the group was a good opportunity for me to see and to know Israel. For this I am deeply grateful to my wonderful parents.

I enjoyed very much being a part of the organization, so at sixteen I participated in a training program to become a counselor. For a year I volunteered as a counselor.

My first boyfriend was Michael, a good-looking and nice Sephardic guy from my group. At the same time Dan, an Ashkenazic guy also from my group, started sending love letters to me. I felt like Maria in “West Side Story.” No, nobody died over me, we got along very well.

During my teen years I spent most of my vacations with my youth group, staying in one of the kibbutzim. I helped with the seasonal agricultural duties like apple, orange, peach, and grapefruit picking. The most difficult job was picking grapefruits because of the big thorns on the trees. In the kibbutz we ate our evening meals together in a big dining room. I liked to eat the meatballs that contained more bread than meat. Afterwards we would talk and share our experiences. Tuesdays were movie nights and the dining room became the movie theater. Israeli dances were held on Friday evenings. Volunteers from other countries were welcomed in the kibbutz. They worked in exchange for free meals and lodgings. They had a separate dance room where they danced ballroom dances almost every night. Sometimes we would go there and dance also. I met Xavier, a volunteer from France, who later on developed a crush on me. In order to carry on a conversation with him, I had to exercise my poor English skills. After he returned to France, we kept in touch for a while until the romance faded away.
At fourteen years old I attended Kugel High School in Holon. It was forty minutes’ walking distance from my home. Our uniform was a light blue shirt with the school logo on the left front pocket, and blue pants or skirts. The girls were not allowed to wear skirts that were too short. Our principal would stand every morning at the entrance and check the length of the skirts. Those who wore short skirts were sent home to change.

In my junior and senior years, once in a while my friends and I would skip school to have fun and some excitement. We took the bus to Tel Aviv and went to the courthouse to watch a trial proceeding in a real courtroom. The tension of the arguments between the defense and prosecution and the wisdom of the judge’s decisions were thrilling to me. Today my favorite TV show is “The Practice.”

One incident that convinced me that my aunt Janet has some mystical powers happened in my senior year. I remember one particular evening when my mom and I took the bus to visit aunt Janet in Bat-Yam (she and her family had left Beersheba). Bat-Yam is between Tel Aviv and Holon. I loved playing séance with my friends to know what the future held in store for us, so while we were there I asked her to read my future held. She gave me a deck of cards and asked me to make a wish, and then she spread the cards on her bed and told me that I have a guardian angel. She also told me that I would receive a letter from someone who is behind me all day. I racked my brains trying to figure out whom she meant. Two weeks later I received a love letter from Shmuel, a classmate who sat behind me in class all day.

My Father’s part-time job

To provide for the growing needs of his teenage children, my father took an evening job in the Holon Cultural Center. The Center was for events like art exhibits, concerts, lectures, and special showing of foreign films. My father’s job was to open and to stay there to close the place. Sometimes he would get bored during art exhibits when people did not show up; he would talk to the artists and they became his friends. An old dollar coin, which I still have, was a gift to my father from an American artist. Hanging in my sister Frieda’s home in Israel are paintings from other artists that were also given as gifts to my Dad.

We helped my father with his second job. My mother would sell tickets for the events and we would sell refreshments during the break. While we were there, my mother and I would go in and listen to the concert performances. That was how I learned to appreciate and enjoy classical music. We also enjoyed the movies, the plays, and other performances. Attending these events enriched me culturally.

One particular act was an African band show. One of the members of the band taught my sister Carmela a song that starts with the word “sisi.” She liked the song so much that she sang it all the time and even taught it to her friends. Pretty soon her friends started calling
her Sisi. When she was seventeen she changed her name and now everyone calls her Sisi, including me.

**Joining the army**

In Israel, it is required that after high school graduation every young man and young woman serve in the army. Young women serve for twenty months and young men serve for three years. After graduation I joined the army. In my two months of training I learned survival skills and how to use weapons. My assignment was data processor in the army’s computer department. My base was not far from Tel Aviv, so I went home taking two buses almost daily except the days when I was on guard duty. I worked alternate morning and evening shifts for one week at a time. I became friends with Yael, a nice young woman from Tel Aviv, who worked the same shifts with me. She and I would hitchhike all over Israel in our army uniforms. People would be happy to help us and give us a ride. Today, soldiers are forbidden to do this because of the tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

*Me at the army training camp at age 18.*

*My friend Yael and I hitchhike to Eilat.*
CHAPTER FOUR: ADULTHOOD

College education

After I had completed my army service, a police representative invited me to join the force as an investigator. It would take only six months’ training. I gave some thought to the offer because of my interest in everything related to the court. Then I realized that my first desire was to be a teacher. Later when I related this incident to my husband, he commented, “You were born to be an investigator, you don’t need to take any course, it is in your blood.”

I attended Levinski College, which is affiliated with Tel Aviv University, to major in education. After three years I received my bachelor’s degree in elementary education with majors in Bible studies and mathematics.

1971—I am in front of my home.

Meeting Bernardo

At the beginning of my second year in college, my friends and I went to a dance held at Tel Aviv University. There I met my future husband, Bernardo Flasterstein. I remember him as a guy with eyeglasses, five feet five inches tall, wearing a cognac corduroy jacket and cognac corduroy pants and a black t-shirt. He asked me for a dance. He was light on his feet and a fabulous dancer. As I looked at his lively green eyes with the longest eyelashes I have ever seen, I knew at that moment that he is my “beshert,” my match ordained from heaven.

At that time Bernardo was a third year medical student and was living in a dorm on the Jerusalem campus. We talked a lot on the phone; I realized that he is smart and has a terrific sense of humor. On weekends he would come to Tel Aviv, where his parents lived. We would meet with our friends, watch movies and plays, and attend parties. On October 6, 1973 Bernardo and I were planning to see a movie but the Yom Kippur War broke out and Bernardo was called in to fight. I still keep the tickets with the special date on them. Occasionally on our way home from a date we would stop at a steak house to eat. There I had my first non-kosher meal of pita filled with pork chops. In my home we kept the dietary laws that permit Jews to eat only meat that is the flesh of animals that are cloven-footed and chew cud, such as cattle, sheep, goat, and deer. Fish that have both fins and scales are permitted. Jews are forbidden to eat meat and dairy products at the same meal. Today I eat non-kosher food but I still cannot eat a cheeseburger.
My husband Bernardo Flasterstein was born on April 29, 1952 in Bolivia. At seventeen he moved to Israel to study medicine at Jerusalem University, following his brother Armando who was studying engineering at Haifa Technical Institute.

Both born in Poland in 1928, his parents Moises and Fella were Holocaust survivors. They got married at the end of World War II and moved to Bolivia. Two years after Bernardo left home, they immigrated to Israel with his two younger brothers, Jaime and Pepe. His mother stayed home to raise the boys while his father tried his luck in business. Yiddish and Spanish were spoken in their house. His father was also fluent in Hebrew because he studied in a Hebrew school before the war broke out. His mother, on the other hand, knew very few Hebrew words and conversed very poorly in it.

My parents are warm and friendly. They welcomed Bernardo and loved him. However, Bernardo’s parents were formal; they did not talk to me and did not try to get to know me. In my presence they would talk in Spanish and at that time I knew very few Spanish words; however, when they started a sentence with ella, I knew they were talking about me. The main reason they treated me dreadfully was because I am not Ashkenazic; I am a Sephardic Jew. They were convinced that I was only after their money and that Bernardo was attracted to me because of my “great sexual skills.” They did not know that I did not have any of those skills.

Bernardo and I had been going out for two years when one evening, while we were having a candlelight dinner in a nice restaurant, he held my hands and told me that he was breaking up with me because his parents could not accept me as a daughter-in-law. I was shocked and confused; I was certain that our relationship was going very well. He took me home and we gave each other a good-bye kiss. As I entered the house, my mother immediately sensed that something was wrong. When I told her what happened, her face turned pale and she looked somber. The following day she told my sister Sisi for the first time how her “first love” had broken her heart.

In my third year of college, a friend introduced me to Jack. We dated for six months. While we were going out, Bernardo would call and talk with my mom, asking about me. I remember one Friday evening he called and asked what my plan for the evening was. I told him Jack and I were going to play bingo. That evening at the bingo hall I saw him with a girl friend, watching me all the time. When I excused myself to freshen up, Bernardo
followed me. As we talked and tried to catch up with what was happening in our lives, we felt the tension and longing in our hearts.

Five months before my graduation, I knew that I had to be far away from Bernardo. I made the decision to go to the United States for a vacation. I worked as a data processor to save money for my trip. Bernardo did not stop calling me. The evening before I left, he came over to my house and we had a serious talk. I felt like he did not want me to leave. The next morning he took me to the airport while my family rode in my friend Judith’s car.

Getting away

Before I flew to New York, my friend Rachel asked me to go to a dance at Tel Aviv University. I told her that I would go but would stay only if I saw a nice guy. When I entered the hall and saw a tall good-looking guy, I told Rachel that I would stay longer only if he would ask me for a dance. At that moment, as if it were a miracle, the guy approached us and asked me for a dance. While we were dancing I asked him if he had overheard us talking and he said he had not. His name was Shai, and he was an Ashkenazic guy from my town. At that time he was in his senior year majoring in mathematics at Tel Aviv University. He was very pleasant and smart and at the end of the evening he gave us a ride home so that we did not have to take the bus. We liked each other very much and we started to go out together. When I told him that I would be in New York for the summer, he said that he would be there at the same time.

In New York, I met up with Shai. Together we toured the city and he surprised me by taking me to see a basketball game at Madison Square Garden. Meanwhile I stayed in touch with Bernardo, who was becoming worried that my relationship with Shai was getting serious. When I flew to Colombia to visit my aunt Fortun, I received a phone call from him. He proposed to me over the phone and I accepted. I went back to Israel for his brother Pepe’s Bar Mitzvah. Bernardo introduced me to the guests as his future wife; his parents still did not accept me. Bernardo and I lived together in his dorm in Jerusalem.

His parents sent a detective to our neighbors to investigate my family’s background. Presumably our neighbors spoke highly of us, so his parents agreed to meet my family and
to discuss our wedding. At first they did not want a big wedding because they were afraid that my family and relatives lacked some social decorum and might embarrass them. After watching my brother’s wedding video they agreed to have a big wedding that, ironically, Bernardo and I paid for with the money we received as wedding gifts.
Our wedding

Our wedding on January 29, 1976 in Tel-Aviv.

We were married on January 29, 1976. It was a big beautiful wedding which we paid for with the money we received as wedding gifts. A well-known band in Tel Aviv played at the reception. The rabbi who officiated was Rabbi Lau. Today he is the Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi in Israel. Years later, those who attended our wedding were still talking about it. After our wedding, Bernardo’s parents and his brothers Jaime and Pepe, moved to Costa Rica, where they still live today.

After our wedding, Bernardo started his seventh year of medical school. That year he rotated through different departments in medicine. We moved back to Jerusalem, and lived in a dorm, in a three–bedroom-

apartment we shared with two other students. One of them was Zvi, who studied dentistry. He and Bernardo had been roommates since their first year in Jerusalem, and were good friends. Later Zvi married Dafna and they lived in Tel Aviv. On our wedding day they drove us to the wedding hall. We went out together on weekends, and raised our children together. At that time Bernardo worked nightshifts as a nurse in the hospital, and I worked as a data processor at the university.

In the dorms in Jerusalem with our friends.
Our first house

In the summer of 1976, we bought an apartment owned by my father-in-law in Givataim, which is close to Tel Aviv. My father paid the down payment; Bernardo and I took a mortgage at a very low interest rate that was offered by the government to new immigrants like Bernardo. It was a three-bedroom apartment. We did not have much furniture. I remember that we bought a cheap corduroy living room set that was not comfortable. Our guests would sit on the floor and lean on the seats. For a living room table I used a TV box covered with a nice tablecloth.

The building had sixteen units that were purchased mostly by newly-married couples. We lived on the fourth floor and there was no elevator. We got along very well with our neighbors. Batia, who lived next door, became my best friend. Whenever I travel to Israel I always spend several days with her. Edith, who lived on the third floor, was also a good friend. For three months Bernardo was at home studying for his final examination. After his graduation, he joined the army to fulfill his military obligations. While he was a student, he was considered a “reservist” training for the service during school breaks. After training he was made lieutenant and was sent to serve in an army base in the Sinai desert as a physician.

My first job as a teacher

At that time I started to work as a teacher in Ramat Gan, fifteen minutes by car from our home. I had Bernardo’s car that he had received as “a gift from his parents for breaking up with me.” I took driving lessons, and drove that car to work. My first job was to teach a third grade class. Although teaching requires many hours of preparation, lessons plans, and grading papers, I enjoyed my interaction with the students and their families. I learned that if the teacher believes in the student’s abilities and expects success, the student will make every effort not to disappoint the teacher. During my second year of teaching, the superintendent came to watch me in the class. After the class I met him for a review. He told me that he was impressed by the lesson and by the way I held the students’ attention and kept them focused. Then he added, “The children fixed their gaze on you like you were an actress on a stage.” He also gave me some sound advice for future teaching that I followed and passed on to other teachers. To show me how much he appreciated my work,
he gave me a permanent position right away. I really must have made quite an impression on him, because usually teachers in Israel get a permanent position only after three years of teaching. I became more involved in the school as a member of different committees. I taught there for thirteen years until I moved with my family to the U.S.A.

Our first child

Efrat, our first-born child, was born on June 30, 1977. She brought a lot of happiness to our life, along with sleepless nights. I remember taking her first pictures. As we developed the film, we noticed that Efrat looked darker-skinned in the photos than she was in reality; that would have really worried my in-laws. Bernardo and I joked about the idea of sending those pictures to them. My friends Batia and Edith gave birth around the same time; we helped each other, baby-sat for each other, and together took our babies to the park. With Bernardo absent, I don’t know how I would have been able to manage the housework, my teaching job, and raise Efrat without the help of my friends.

Bernardo came home every other weekend. In the evening I was lonely and fearful; many evenings I would go to have coffee, watch TV and chat with my friends. We would have the doors open, in order to see if someone were coming up the stairs or to hear if the babies cried. I remember one evening I was at Edith’s and when I went back home I found a cat in my bedroom, sitting on my pillow. I was so scared that I asked Edith’s husband to come over and remove the cat. I changed the linens and went to sleep.
My mother’s sudden death

My mother passed away when Efrat was a year and two months old. It was on a Saturday, August 17, 1978. She was only fifty years old when she suddenly died from a heart attack. I was devastated. I could not understand or accept how my mom, who was modest, righteous, and devoted to her family and everyone else, could be taken away so young. I was so angry with God for letting it happen. I was sad that my children would not have the chance to know her, and was sorry that I did not tell her enough how much I loved her. Everyone who knew my mom was in shock. Hundreds of people came to her funeral to pay their last respects. Before the funeral, the rabbi made a tear in my black shirt near my heart as a public announcement of my grief. When they laid her to rest my brother recited the Kaddish, a mourner’s prayer. Then those at the cemetery threw a handful of earth into the grave. Afterwards we went back to my parents’ home and stayed there for seven days to mourn. People came and shared their good memories of Mom. Every evening a rabbi came to pray for her soul and hold a Torah study. He told me that my mom had died as a righteous person, because she left the world on a Saturday—a Shabbat—that was the first day of a Hebrew month (new month) and she did not suffer. After talking with the rabbi, I felt that my mother was in heaven watching over us. My brother had been very close to Mom. When he got married he bought a house in the same neighborhood, and everyday before going home he would stop by to visit her. Later when he started his business from home she was his secretary, answering the phone for him and taking orders. After she died, my brother became an atheist, self-centered and living his own life because he felt that life is short and unfair. I on the other hand, became more religious and family-oriented. As a reminder of Mom I have her wedding ring, which I wear next to my own wedding ring, and a gold bracelet.

Years later when we visited Israel for the first time after moving to the United States, my aunt Janet invited my sisters, my brother, and me, along with our families, for brunch. The excitement of seeing us all together gave her a strong desire to tell her memories of my mom. When she told us about my mom’s first love experience, she did it so vividly that everyone in the room was in tears. She described how the fiancé’s mother came to my grandfather asking him to punish her and then asked for forgiveness, because her first son’s child was born crippled. Then she told us that from the time she left Egypt she did not have any contact with the fiancé’s family until two days after my mom’s funeral. While my aunt was walking in the street, a woman stopped her. She was the former fiancé’s sister. She told my aunt that her brother, whom my aunt not heard from since the “wedding,” had sent her a letter from London asking about my mother. Aunt Janet told her that my mother had passed away. Two weeks later my aunt saw her wearing black. She told my aunt that she had received a phone call informing her that her brother just passed away.

The car accident

In May of 1979, Bernardo had a few days off. He came home from the Sinai driving an army vehicle. We decided to take advantage of the vehicle and drive to Eilat for a vacation. Eilat is a four hours’ drive from Tel Aviv. The city was built close to the Red Sea. When we were on the highway, half an hour from Eilat, Bernardo lost control of the car. It went
off the road and turned over. Bernardo, who was wearing his seat belt, came out without any injury. I, on the other hand, had taken off the seat belt just a moment before in order to get a drink, and I was thrown out of the car. I was unconscious, for a short time. Then I heard Bernardo telling me that he had checked my legs and that I would be able to walk again. I broke my pelvic bones and several of my ribs were fractured. I was lucky to be alive and not paralyzed because that highway was considered very dangerous, and every day in the news there were reports of fatal accidents there. My mother’s bracelet that I was wearing at that time became twisted. I kept the bracelet to remind me that my mother was watching over me. Today my daughter Efrat has the bracelet and she wears it all the time. I was in the hospital for three months. Bernardo was transferred to a base close to home in order to take care of Efrat and me.

Our second child

When I was pregnant with my second child, I had an ultrasound, which showed that we were going to have a son. Bernardo was so happy because our son would be the first one to carry on his family name; Bernardo’s older brother Armando has three daughters. Our son Ran was born on November 20, 1981. The night before, Bernardo had taken me out to dinner to celebrate my birthday. The following morning I was scheduled for a checkup. Because of the injury to my pelvic bones, I had to have a Caesarean section. Bernardo told me not to eat that morning, for apparently he knew I would deliver that day. When my doctor asked if I wanted to have the baby, I agreed, and Ran was my thirtieth birthday present.

Family gathering

Meanwhile my father remarried. We stayed very close as a family. Every Saturday we would meet at my dad’s home. I liked to go back to the neighborhood and see my former neighbors. The men played cards or dominos in the balcony and we, the women, sat on the grass across from them. We talked about our experiences from the previous week and tried to solve the world’s problems. Our children would play hide and seek and other games that we used to play. Then we would go to Holon Center to have pizza, falafel, and ice cream. On our way home we would always bring food for the men. I have fond memories of those Saturday gatherings.
Our third child

In 1982, Bernardo completed his military service. He decided to become a pediatrician and started his residency at Belinson Hospital. Two years later, on July 24, 1984, our third child, Idan, was born. Idan’s day of birth was memorable: Election Day in Israel. It was the day when, for the first time, the Likud party with Menachem Begin running for prime minister defeated the Labor party with Yitzchak Rabin and Simon Peres.

Our second house

In 1985 we moved to Ramat Aviv Gimel, an exclusive neighborhood in Tel Aviv. Israeli producers copied the idea of having a TV show about our neighborhood from the popular American TV show “Beverly Hills 90210.” We lived in a complex of four fifteen-floor buildings with a swimming pool and tennis courts. Each building had a doorman; our four-bedroom apartment was on the ninth floor, with a great view of the Mediterranean Sea. When Bernardo finished his residency, he used one of the rooms for his first clinic.

I had a good relationship with my neighbors; one of them was Aliza, who lived next door. She was in her sixties; she baby-sat our children and taught Efrat to play piano. Lea, who lived on the third floor, was my good friend. Her daughter Ofra and our son Idan were the same age. They went together to kindergarten and when they came back they would eat at my home or Lea’s, and then they would play. Our first year in the United States, we were informed that Lea’s son Gadi had been killed in a military operation. When I go to Israel I always visit them.

Bernardo, who wanted to specialize as a pediatric neurologist, started to look for a good training program in the United States, because this particular training was not available in Israel at that time. Bernardo was accepted for a three-year’ residency at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Cleveland, Ohio.

Moving to Cleveland

In the summer of 1990, we moved to Cleveland. While looking for a place to live, we stayed in a hotel for a month. My first morning in Cleveland, an Israeli friend brought us coffee, but forgot to bring sugar. In order to wake up I must have coffee, so I drank it without sugar and from that day and on I cannot drink any sweetened drink. With the help of my father-in-law who paid the down payment, we bought a house in Beachwood. It is a nice neighborhood populated with eighty percent Jews. It has a very good school system due to the fact that they get tax money from a mall and a science center that are located there.

Our children did not know English, so the Beachwood education department hired three full-time tutors to teach them English. Each one of the tutors knew Hebrew. They sat with our children in class, helping them to understand the lessons and to prepare homework. In September of that year we went back to Israel for my brother-in-law’s wedding. When I told my friends that the Beachwood education department paid three salaries just for our
children, they couldn’t believe it. Apparently this help was a big expense so we were lucky to be the first and last to get it. For a winter vacation, we went to New York, and while at the hotel we overheard Ran and Idan talking in English. Later Idan complained that his tutor talked all the time and he was unable to listen to his teacher or concentrate. At that time we understood that Ran and Idan didn’t need to continue with this help. Efrat, on the other hand, attended eighth grade and had to continue with this help for several more months. In 1995, Efrat graduated from high school and was accepted to Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. She decided to major in social work.

We had many Israeli friends in Cleveland; one of them was Maya, who became a good friend. We used to talk every morning and shared our plans and problems. Almost every Friday we went to a house sale. Most of my art deco I bought with her, and thanks to her I learned a lot about European art. In Israel she had worked as a psychologist. With a good friend, especially her, who needs psychological treatment? Our friends accepted us with open arms, they helped us with advice, invited us for holidays, and on the weekends we spent time together. I talked Hebrew most of the time. We used to exchange and later discuss books in Hebrew. So my poor English was not improved. I took two college classes in English writing, which helped me a lot, but writing my life story has been a big challenge and I have learned a lot from this process.

While in Israel we heard that the Cleveland Orchestra was one of the best in the United States. We bought season tickets for the Cleveland Orchestra and the Cleveland Opera; while I liked this very much, Bernardo, who is not fond of classical music, wanted to go to sports games. As a family we bought season tickets for the NBA Cleveland team, the Cavaliers. We also learned to enjoy baseball. At the time the Cleveland NBA team and the baseball team, the Indians, were at their best.

Our first year in Cleveland, I taught Hebrew in a synagogue. I did not like it because the children were not happy to study after school and on Saturdays, and when they spoke fast I could hardly understand them. The next year I was lucky to meet a Hebrew teacher who taught at the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies. She asked me to substitute for her. From that day I was hired to teach there. I taught Modern Hebrew in the adult education program and I loved it. My students became my friends. The piano in my home is a gift from one of them, my friend Jane Jones.

After two years in Cleveland, my children had turned into Americans. Efrat, who was crying every day for the first three months, was happy now. We had a serious talk about our future, and decided to stay in the United States. When Bernardo completed his residency training in the summer of 1993, we flew to Israel. Now, looking at things from a different perspective, I saw how Israel had changed. It was not the same Israel as the one where I grew up. I did not agree with the political changes and with the fact that Israel maintains control of the occupied territories. My father used to say that the occupation would eventually harm Israel. Now I know that he was right. He passed away in December, 1993; he was seventy-nine years old.
In order to change our status in the U.S. and become citizens, Bernardo had to work in a county hospital. He worked at Metropolitan Hospital from 1993 until 1998, when we moved to Springfield, Missouri.

Ran’s Bar Mitzvah

In 1994 we celebrated Ran’s Bar Mitzvah. This celebration of puberty occurs at the age of thirteen. This tradition is about two thousand years old. The preparation for the Bar Mitzvah begins several months before the boy’s thirteenth birthday. He must prepare for the day when he will be called in front of the congregation to chant from the Torah. The celebration usually takes place on Sabbath or the first day of a new month.

Ran was the first Bar Mitzvah boy in Bernardo’s family and mine. To celebrate this special occasion with us, my brother and my two sisters came from Israel, my aunts and cousins came from Miami, and Bernardo’s family came from Costa Rica. On Saturday morning we went to the synagogue. Ran chanted the Torah in front of hundreds of people, the synagogue members and our family and friends. I was very proud of him. When he completed his reading, everyone threw candies at him as a wish for a sweet and good future. Then we had lunch at the synagogue. In the evening we continued the celebration with dinner and dancing at the Embassy Suites Hotel. Ran likes basketball and he chose a basketball theme for the party. I remember that the place cards were in the shape of a Cavaliers (Cleveland NBA team) game ticket. Ran asked thirteen families to come and light a candle as an acknowledgment of their importance in his life. The first candle I lit for my mom and dad whose presence I felt; I knew they were watching over us.

![Lighting the candles ceremony—Ran’s Bar Mitzvah.](image)

Idan’s Bar Mitzvah

In the summer of 1997 we celebrated Idan’s Bar Mitzvah. Two weeks before the celebration, my sister Frieda and my sister Sisi’s daughter, Rachel, came from Israel. My brother, my aunts and cousins, and Bernardo’s family came several days before the Bar Mitzvah. At that time my sister Sisi was hospitalized due to a high fever. We talked to her and she sounded well. The day before the Bar Mitzvah, Frieda’s husband called and told us that Sisi was seriously ill and had been moved to the intensive care unit. Bernardo talked to the physicians and learned that she had developed aplastic anemia, respiratory failure, and
was in a coma. Sisi is a widow, so my sister Frieda and my niece flew back to Israel immediately. The next morning, Saturday, we went to the synagogue. Idan chanted his Torah portion. The synagogue was filled with the congregation, family, and friends. Idan did a very good job and I was proud of him. While I was happy for him, I wasn’t able to fully concentrate on him. I had mixed emotions, happiness and sadness, at the same time. I was smiling at our guests and crying in my heart. The ceremony ended by throwing candies, and then we had lunch at the synagogue. When we came back home, Bernardo spoke with the hospital physicians and was informed that my sister’s condition had worsened and she was in a critical condition. They still had no diagnosis and did not know the cause of her illness. I decided to fly to Israel the next day. The celebration continued that evening with dinner and dancing at the Embassy suites. Idan’s theme was the Simpsons. That evening during the celebration, I lit three of the candles, one for my parents, one for my sister Frieda who had flown back to Israel, and one for my sister Sisi with a prayer for her full recovery.

My brother and his wife light candles at Idan’s Bar Mitzvah.

My sister’s illness

When I arrived in Israel, my sister Frieda took me straight to the hospital. Sisi’s children Rachel and Ben were sitting in the waiting room with fear in their eyes; Frieda’s children and friends were sitting with them. When I saw Sisi I hardly recognized her. She was comatose, all swollen and hooked up to multiple tubes, IVs and a breathing machine. I went to her bedside and whispered in her ear that she had to be strong and that I would devote my efforts toward her recovery. The next morning, I talked with the department chair, Dr. Dolev, who knew my husband. He told me that he had discussed my sister’s case with a professor from Jerusalem. He told me that they were considering all possible diagnoses. He mentioned that we should pray and hope that Sisi’s body and systems would not collapse. I went back to Sisi’s room and told her again that she had to be strong, continue to fight and not quit. My aunt Janet said that we should go to the cemetery, to our parents’ graves, and pray for Sisi. I went there with Frieda and my aunt Janet. While standing by my parents’ graves, my aunt Janet went into a trance begging my parents to pray for their daughter and ask God to save her. When we return from the cemetery, I saw that Sisi had developed multiple skin spots. This was a sign that helped her physicians to diagnose her illness. It was Rocky Mountain spotted fever. This disease is caused by ticks,
which she probably got from her dog. I believe that the combination of our prayers and the right therapy helped her to have a full recovery.

A year later when I visited Israel, Sisi told me that I had saved her life. She said that when she was in a coma it seemed to her as if she were constantly walking and she wanted to sit down to rest, but I was there telling her to keep moving.

**Moving to Springfield, Missouri**

In one of Bernardo’s annual conventions, in San Francisco, we met an Israeli couple who lived in Springfield, Missouri and became good friends. They came several times to visit us in Cleveland and were impressed by our big group of Israeli friends. When they asked us to visit them in Springfield, our reaction was: “Springfield-MISSOURI??????” We thought that a vacation in Springfield would be a waste of time and money. Our friend said that St. John’s Hospital was looking for a pediatric neurologist; he gave them Bernardo’s name and address. Several days later Bernardo received an invitation to come for an interview. Everything was paid, airline tickets, hotel accommodations and rental car. We flew to Springfield to visit our friends, with no intention of moving there. The next morning, Bernardo went for the interview and I was scheduled to meet a realtor. In the evening we went for dinner with a group of physicians to a nice restaurant. I didn’t think that Bernardo was serious about the move, because at that time we had just received our green cards and the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, a prestigious hospital, had offered Bernardo a job. He liked St. John’s offer better. He liked the idea of being independent but still affiliated with a hospital. For spring vacation, they sent an invitation to the entire family; they wanted us to have an opportunity to get a better look at Springfield. This time I visited the schools and talked with the counselors, who assured me that my children would not feel any discrimination because of their religion. I went to see the synagogue and met the rabbi, Rita Sherwin, who was very friendly. In the beginning I really did not want to move, but Bernardo’s opportunity and the challenge of meeting new people changed my decision. I was planning to stay in Springfield until Idan’s graduation from high school. I felt like a pioneer. In the summer of 1998 we moved to Springfield, where we bought a house in Spring Creek. Ran was in his senior year in Kickapoo High School and Idan was an eighth-grade student in the middle school. It was a new beginning for us, so I asked them to wait several months and only then to tell me their opinion of the move. After a few months Ran said that the move was a good experience for him, he learned that he would be able to adjust to college easier than he thought. Idan said, “Mom, everything is about the Benjamins.” I did not understand what he meant until he told me that Benjamins are hundred dollar bills. Then he said, “Mom, it’s OK.”

**Trip to Egypt**

In the summer of 2000, we flew to Israel and spent two weeks with family and friends. Then we flew to Egypt with my two sisters to look for our roots and to experience my parents’ childhood environment. It was important to me that my husband and my children learn about my family’s past. We cruised along the Nile. Our personal guide was an English teacher who told us that he made more money from our tips than as a teacher. He
taught us everything about the history of ancient Egypt. In Cairo, we saw the land of Goshen, the place where the people of Israel settled when they moved to Egypt. We saw the pyramids and the Sphinx. We visited the history museum and went to see our parents’ old neighborhood. We saw the house where they used to live. On our way back to the hotel, we also saw the movie theater where they used to go while they were dating.

*My parent’s home in Cairo, Egypt.*

*Ran’s life after high school*

Ran graduated from Kickapoo High School in 1999. He was accepted to Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. In December 2003 he graduated with a major in business and a minor in Spanish and English. I hope he will find a job he will like and enjoy. In the summer of 2002, in order to become fluent in Spanish, Ran studied one semester in Barcelona, Spain. For our winter vacation, we flew to Spain to visit him, to tour the country and to learn about Sephardic Jewish history. In Barcelona, Ran was our tour guide; we rented a big van so the entire family could sit comfortably. We visited Madrid, Toledo, Cordova, Seville, Granada and Valencia. Bernardo, who was our driver, did a very good job driving this van through the narrow alleys. In Cordova, we saw the old Jewish synagogue where Maimonides used to pray. Maimonides was a twelfth-century Jewish sage. His major contribution to Jewish life is the Mishne Torah, a code of Jewish law that later served as a model for the Shulhan Aruch. He was born in Spain and, to avoid persecution by the Muslims, he fled to Morocco, later to Israel, and finally to Egypt. He also served as a physician to the Sultan of Egypt.
Efrat’s wedding

My daughter Efrat’s wedding. Left to right, my aunt Fortun, me, my daughter, aunt Janet, aunt Lilian. (2001)

Efrat met her future husband, Doug Horwitz, during her last year at Ohio State University. At the time he was studying for his master’s degree in hospital administration. Doug grew up in the Cleveland suburb of Beachwood, in the same neighborhood where we had lived. He graduated from Beachwood High School two years earlier than Efrat. They married in September 2001, in Cleveland. For the wedding, my aunt Janet and my two sisters came from Israel, my other aunts came from Miami, Bernardo’s family came from Costa Rica, and also several friends came from Springfield. We put a lot of effort and money into Efrat’s wedding so it would be like a dream come true. Indeed, it was a fabulous event. Efrat was so happy and beautiful, and she looked like
a princess; later she told me that, on her wedding day, she felt like one. Today they live in Sarasota, Florida.

_Idan’s life after high school_

Idan graduated from Kickapoo High School in 2002. He was accepted to Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, and he lives in the dorms. Even though he lives close to us and has a car, we hardly see him; he enjoys being independent.
CHAPTER SIX: LIFE IN SPRINGFIELD

I am a secular Jew. In Israel and in Cleveland I went to the synagogue only on holy days and special occasions, but in Springfield I go more often. Here I learned to chant and sing all the Sabbath prayers. Even though part of the service is in English, I pray only in Hebrew. I became involved with the synagogue. I chair the holiday committee and serve on the board. I volunteered to teach a Hebrew class for adults, but when one of them left, it all fell apart. I want very much to teach Modern Hebrew; hopefully I will find an adult program that will take advantage of my knowledge. In our first year in Springfield I met Ruth at the synagogue. Already at our first encounter, we felt like we had known each other forever. We celebrated the holidays together. She is a true friend and I share everything with her. Ruth and I played bridge; she introduced me to Peg and Mary, and the four of us started playing every week. It was social bridge that included lunch and lots of girl talk. Ruth left Springfield in the summer of 2000 and now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. I miss her very much, and we talk every week. I continue to play with my friends Mary, Peg, and Randy. Once in a while on Saturdays we get together with our husbands, have dinner and play bridge.

In the summer of 1999, the Simon family moved to Springfield from Long Beach, California. We became good friends, and we celebrate holidays together. Shelley Simon is a good friend of mine and we share everything. She has had a hard time adjusting to Springfield, and I try to illuminate for her the benefits of this place. Shelley is a very good baker but I don’t take advantage of it because of my desire to lose weight. She is a very good cook and her outstanding cooking is a major part of the holiday celebrations at the synagogue.

Now our home is an empty nest. I am more involved with the Opera Guild, and I am a member of an investment club. Once in a while I am asked to talk at a Presbyterian church about Jewish holidays and traditions. The bridge center became my husband’s and my “second home.” We play there almost every evening. We usually don’t play together as partners, because the game is very competitive and we have fought a lot over games. We have met nice people there and we enjoy playing with them.
MY LIFE MISSION

I am family oriented, but it is difficult to see my children as often as I would like. Being with my family is the best gift for me, so at least twice a year we get together for a vacation. I like to visit new places with them and to share the experiences.

I have a strong faith in God and I believe in the power of prayer, and I pray every day.

I learned from my parents that money is not everything in life; it is possible to raise good and happy children without a lot of money. Dedication, unconditional love and honesty are more important for a healthy and happy family. The closeness of family, having good and happy children, and a good spouse do not compare with all the money in the world.

I believe that we should be good to others, be tolerant to other religions and other’s opinions. We should respect differences and relate to everyone as an equal regardless of social status. These are moral values, that I believe, can reward every human being and contribute to all of society.

Hillel and Shamai were two Jewish sages who often argued and had different approaches to teaching the Torah. A gentile once came to Shamai asking, “teach me all of the Torah while standing on one foot.” Shamai took a ruler and drove his questioner away as a scoffer. The gentile then approached Hillel with the same request and Hillel replied, “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Go and learn!”

I like this story because I believe that Hille’s golden rule “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” must be fulfilled. By following this rule, Isaiah’s prophecy “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” can be carried out; and I believe that only in this way there will be shalom-peace in the world.